



San Jose Community College
San Jose, Malilipot, Albay
A.Y. 2020-2021



PREFINAL
GE7 – ETHICS
No. of units: 3

LEARNER'S ACTIVITY SHEET 1

(Normative Ethical Traditions: Identifying Right or Wrong)

2. Deontological Ethics

Non-Consequentialism

All deontological ethics theories are non-consequentialist. This means that they place the emphasis on the decision or action itself – on the motivations, principles, or ideals underlying the decision or action – rather than being concerned with the outcomes or consequences of that decision or action. This reasoning is founded on the desirability of principle (usually duties or rights) to act in a given situation. The two main non-consequentialist theories are ethics of duties and ethics of rights and justice. Both of these are rooted in assumptions about universal rights and wrongs and responsibilities. This means that people who promote these types of ethical principles usually believe that they should be applied to everyone, everywhere in the world. If a child in one country has a right to an education, then this means that all children, everyone in the world, should have a right to an education. Examples of these types of principles can be found in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, from which the text below is taken.

Article 2: The Universal Declaration of Human Rights

'Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty.'

Source: UN (2012)

Duties

Most people believe that all human beings have some duties to other human beings. Duties can be positive, such as the duty to look after one's children, or negative, such as the duty

not to murder another human being. When people use the language of duties, they usually do so in a way that implies that the duty is universal to all human beings (or at least to all adult humans of sound mind). The foundation of theories of duties is the theory developed by the German philosopher, Immanuel Kant (1724–1804). Rather than relying on religion to tell us what our duties are, Kant believed that we can rely on our powers of reason to do so. At the centre of Kant's theory of duty is what he termed categorical imperatives. Some actions and decisions are founded on our personal desires. For example, you could say, 'If you want to live in a beautiful house, you ought to work hard'. However, this is not a categorical imperative, as it is based simply on fulfilling our desires. A categorical imperative tells us that we must do something, irrespective of our personal desires: for example, 'You ought to look after your parents'.

A central principle of the categorical imperative is that we should treat people as an end, never as a means to an end. This means that people should be treated with dignity. Treating someone as a means to an end involves using them as a tool to achieve something else. Buying products made by workers who have been paid unacceptably low wages in order to ensure a cheap price for the goods they produce, is treating the workers as a means to an end and it not fulfilling the duties we have to those workers. Buying guaranteed 'fair trade' products, in contrast, recognizes our duty to ensure that the workers who produce our goods earn acceptable wages.

The concept of duty is not only used in terms of secular arguments. The exhortation to 'do to others as you would have them do to you' is a text that is taken from Christian scriptures, but it has parallels in many other religious traditions. Both secular and religious notions of duty give us many duties, such as those to keep promises, to avoid injuring others, to compensate others when we do them harm, to uphold justice, to improve the living conditions of others, etc. Duties are very often closely linked to the notion of rights. When somebody has a right, usually this implies that others have a duty to uphold this right.

Rights

Rights theory is one particular duty-based theory of ethics. A right is a justified claim against another person's behaviour. So rights and duties are related in that the rights of one person imply the duty of someone else to uphold that right. As Traer (2009 p. 103) explains, 'the most widely accepted justification for moral rights relies on Kant's deontological argument that we have a duty to treat every person as an end, and not as a means to our ends, because every person is autonomous and rational, and thus has intrinsic worth'.

The concept of individual human rights is fundamental to Western legal systems, and has developed both from the argument that all humans have certain natural rights and from religious notions that rights come from God (Traer 2013). The American Declaration of Independence asserts that 'all men' [sic] are 'endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights' (Traer 2009 p. 104). The 'French revolution proclaimed that the "rights of man" [sic] are natural rights intrinsic to the humanity of each person' (Traer 2009 p. 104). Throughout the 19th century, the justification for rights became more secular, but rights were usually confined to the nation. However, the idea that rights were liberties guaranteed to citizens of a nation was challenged in the 20th century by the realisation that Nazi Germany acted legally under German law when it committed what were later classified as crimes against humanity.

ACTIVITIES:

1. Make a list of at least ten rights which you think that all people on the planet have. Pick the top three ones you think a person can't exist without.
2. Look back at the list of (at least) ten human rights that you wrote for the exercise above. Do you have a duty to uphold any of these rights for anyone else? Justify.
3. Look at Articles 18 and 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 2.2.2. Can you think of any ways in which these two rights could conflict? How?

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Article 18 Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his [sic] religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

Article 19 Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

Source: UN (2012)

4. Look for a selection or a news story or a feature article that talks about duties and rights of a citizen in a country. Paste a copy of it, citing the reference book or link. Make a slogan to be able to summarize the writer's idea.



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LEARNER'S ACTIVITY SHEET 2

(Normative Ethical Traditions: Identifying Right or Wrong)

3. Theological Ethics

Consequentialism

Consequentialist ethics come from the teleological branch of ethical theory. You will remember that teleological theories focus on the goal of the ethical action.

Consequentialist theories are those that base moral judgements on the outcomes of a decision or an action. If the outcomes of an action are considered to be positive, or to give rise to benefits, then that action is held to be morally right. Conversely, if the outcome causes harm, then the action is held to be morally wrong. The judgement of right or wrong depends on the consequences of the decision or action. The two main consequentialist theories considered here are egoism and utilitarianism.

Egoism

Egoism is the theory that one's self is, or should be, the motivation for all of our actions. It is worth distinguishing between egoism as a descriptive argument (an argument that tells us how the world actually is) and egoism as a normative argument (an argument that tells us how the world ought to be). Egoism as a descriptive argument describes human nature as self-centred. In its strongest form, it argues that individuals only ever act in their own self-interest. Even where they appear to be acting in others' interests, descriptive egoism explains that the person is really motivated by their own self-interest disguised by arguments (rationalisations) of 'doing one's duty' or 'helping others'. In fact, our motivation behind doing 'good deeds' may be to make ourselves feel good; to make ourselves look good in the eyes of others; or because we believe that, by helping others, others will help us. Even if we donate money to charity anonymously, we may still only really do this because it makes us feel good about ourselves. In contrast, egoism as a normative argument tells us that we should be acting in our own interests, as this is the only way that overall welfare can be improved. If everyone acts in their own self-interest, then society will become more efficient, which will be in everyone's interest. It is therefore morally right to pursue one's own self-interest.

One of the most famous normative egoists was Adam Smith, one of the pioneers of neo-classical economic theory. He argued that self-interested behaviour is right if it leads to morally acceptable ends. Smith argued that if everyone followed their selfinterest, then society as a whole would be improved. (Importantly, he also argued that if egoism led in fact to the worsening of society, then it should be abandoned.) The theory of egoism is at the heart of capitalist arguments

that a corporation's sole responsibility is to its shareholders. However, some form of social and environmental responsibility can be consistent with egoism because egoist decisions may address immediate moral demands by aiming to satisfy long-term self-maximising objectives – of the firm (eg profitability) or the individual (eg philanthropy). While it is an important theory for understanding economic rationality, we do not consider egoism in great depth here. Of more interest is another consequentialist theory: that of utilitarianism.

Utilitarianism

The modern form of the consequentialist theory of utilitarianism derives from 19th century British philosophers such as Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, and it has been particularly influential in areas of the world influenced by British culture. Rather than maximise individual welfare, utilitarianism focuses on collective welfare and it identifies goodness with the greatest amount of good for the greatest number of people: the 'greatest happiness principle'. So maximising benefits for the greatest number of people involves net assessments of benefit: utility is the net result of benefits and 'disbenefits' – or costs. Utility has entered modern economics as a key quantitative concept. The concept of trade-offs is specifically embraced and social and environmental cost–benefit analyses are explicit utilitarian tools for assessing the goodness of an action. A simple balance sheet of costs and benefits can be drawn up to assess the overall utility of a decision.

Utilitarianism has three essential elements:

- Whether an action is right or wrong is determined solely by its consequences.
- The value of the consequences of an action is assessed in terms of the amount of happiness or well-being caused.
- In assessing the total happiness caused to a number of people, equal amounts of happiness are to have equal value, no one person's happiness having greater value than another's.

Value Ethics

Another branch of the teleological strand of ethics is that of 'being good'. The most well-known of these ethical theories is virtue ethics. Virtue ethics shifts the analytical emphasis away from rule-based decision-making (of deontological ethics) or of the consequences of an action (eg in utilitarianism) towards the ethics of individuals and the ethics of human character. So, for example, where a utilitarian would argue that giving to a charity maximises well-being in society, and a deontologist would argue that we have a duty to help others, a virtue ethicist would point to the fact that helping others displays desirable virtues such as being charitable or benevolent. Other desirable virtues include honesty, courage, friendship, mercy, loyalty, modesty, patience, and so on. The opposite of virtues are vices.

Virtues and vices

'[I]t is possible to see the ethical validity or correctness of an action in terms of conformity to certain types of conduct. Instances or patterns of conduct that are ethically right, good and proper are virtues, while those that are wrong, bad or improper are vices. This [...] pattern of ethical evaluation lends itself particularly to expressions of ethical judgement that emphasize the character of the actor, so that not only is the act virtuous, but also the person who reliably acts in virtuous ways.'

Source: FAO (2004) pp. 7–8

ACTIVITIES:

1. What are some of the key differences between consequentialist and deontological ethics? Show it in a table.
2. The text below is taken from a webpage entitled 'Ten Reasons to Save the Diversity of Life' [biodiversity]. What are the main arguments given here? What kind of ethical reasoning is being used?

Why preserve biodiversity?

Reason 1: Feeding the world

A mere 20 species provide about 90% of the world population's food. All major food crops, including corn, wheat, and soybeans, depend on the introduction of new strains from the wild to cope with evolving disease and pests. If those strains are lost, the security of our food supply will be threatened. For example, a wild relative of corn called milpilla (*Zea diploperennis*) is exceptionally disease-resistant and is the only perennial in the corn family. If successfully interbred with domestic corn, its genes could boost corn production by billions of dollars. *Zea diploperennis* grows on only one mountain in western Mexico.

Source: NatureServe (2010)

3. Do you consider yourself to be a 'good person'? What virtues do you generally demonstrate in your actions and in the decisions you take? Do you have many vices? Write a five-sentence statement as if you are selling yourself to a person who needs to be impressed by you.
4. Make a collage that exhibits the idea of theological branch of ethical theory.

References:

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The Universal Declaration of Human Rights

NatureServe (2010)

FAO (2004) pp. 7—8